INSINUATING: THE SEDUCTION OF UNSAYING

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0. Introduction

Insinuation can be one of the most contemptible and despicable forms of verbal communication. It is a spitefully veiled accusation. According to most dictionaries, to insinuate is to penetrate furtively into the interlocutor's mind, allusively and perfidiously planting a thought within it - generally with provocative intent - through beguiling suasion and seduction, often laced with a liberal sprinkling of confidential and flattering ways. These definitions (admittedly somewhat over-dramatized) are well suited to give a description of the most notable properties of insinuation, and capture particularly vividly the essential aspects of that which in my view represents the highest fictional embodiment of this communicative mode, namely the 'poisonous insinuation' that Iago pours into the ear of the Moor in Shakespeare's Othello, to which I will turn shortly.

In this paper, however, I would like to focus on the analysis of insinuation from a more specific angle, considering it not so much - or not only - as a rhetorical-literary operation, but rather as a linguistic phenomenon that properly belongs to what may be termed discourse semantics, a domain that, for reasons I will soon discuss, is to be viewed as conceptually, logically and concretely linked to the sphere of linguistic pragmatics, within the overarching framework of a semiotics of verbal communication that conceives of human actions as signifying functions acting as both the bearers and generators of meaning.

In this context, insinuation is of specific interest first and foremost on account of the indirect nature of the statements of which it is composed, and secondly because the unsaid meaning is nevertheless perceived as the final act of an interpretive process that cannot fail to recognize in the verbal production a "sign of something else" that the speaker intends to convey.

The present paper will therefore be divided into three sections. The first will focus synthetically on the problem of the unsaid; the second will be devoted, with equal brevity, to the key concept of speaker attitude, while the third will deal with an analysis of the Shakespearian dialogue in the above-mentioned play.

1. The said and the unsaid

The problem of the unsaid is notoriously one of the hot spots of debate on relations between semantics and pragmatics. From the theory of speech acts to studies on discourse implicitness, the dichotomy said/unsaid tends to be taken as a criterion to discriminate between acontextual and truth-conditional semantics on one side,
and on the other side pragmatics, with its emphasis on contextualization and inference. Several papers by Grice (now in Grice 1989) have provided the most extensive systematic theoretical account of the relations between the two members of this opposition. In Grice’s framework, four main levels of meaning describe the notion of "saying that p":

1) timeless meaning of an utterance type
2) applied timeless meaning of an utterance type
3) utterance type occasion meaning
4) utterer’s occasion meaning.

Stated slightly differently, and simplifying a little, it is hypothesized that what is said is composed of the sentence meaning integrated by several contextual ingredients, the quantitative and qualitative limits of which are clearly marked out. In contrast, what is communicated includes what is said and what is implicated, i.e. unsaid, whether conversationally or conventionally.

Grice’s attention focused above all on the relation between what is said and what is communicated. The entire apparatus of the implicatures was specifically set up to account for this relation while maintaining the respective fields of operation of logical semantics and inferential pragmatics distinct. Logical semantics is thus entrusted with analysis of the said, i.e. of the propositional content expressed by a sentence supplemented with contextual information clarifying deictic reference and eliminating any ambiguity of meaning, while inferential pragmatics, on the other hand, is presumed to be responsible for defining the principles and procedures for identification of the meaning that is conveyed above and beyond, and at times in spite of, what is actually said. Formulation of the Cooperative Principle and its subdivision into the maxims of quality, quantity, manner and relation, which are jointly responsible for generating implicature, are, I believe, sufficiently well known as to need any specific description here. I would simply underline that Grice admits the existence of a contextual component in the determination of the propositional content expressed by a sentence: In other words, he admits the presence of an unsaid part functioning as a component of the said, but limited to saturating the sentence meaning with what is necessary for the utterance to express a complete proposition, i.e. one that can be evaluated in terms of truth conditions.

1.1. Grice’s hypothesis has recently been called into question by linguists and philosophers of language who have revised the subdivision of fields whereby the said was assigned to semantics and the unsaid to pragmatics, proposing in its place a
"pragmatics of the said" that considerably reduces the operational domain of semantics. "What is said" has been claimed by a number of writers, starting with Sperber and Wilson 1986, and later Blakemore 1987, Carston 1988, Recanati 1989, Bach 1994, to be largely determined pragmatically because it requires much greater reference to the context of utterance than was previously assumed by Grice. Deictic reference and disambiguation of possible semantic ambiguities are no longer regarded as the only contributions context can make to the determination of propositional content. Sentence meaning underdetermines what is said in other ways, which cannot strictly be reduced to the concept of implicature yet do depend on the context of utterance in ways that are essential for reciprocal understanding by interlocutors.

Some of the clearest examples are found in cases of ellipsis such as in:

(1) He picked up the pistol, went into the bedroom and killed her

where it is obvious that the victim was killed in the bedroom and presumably with the pistol, although this is not stated in the final proposition. Recovery of elided material, in such cases, cannot be considered an implicature, since we would otherwise have to admit that implicatures hold a relation of entailment or implication with the elliptical propositions. (For a more detailed discussion, I refer the reader to Carston 1988).

Equally problematic are cases like

(2) It takes some time to get there
(3) They're all going to Paris

where it is clear that "some" stands for "a considerable quantity" and "all" is not the universal quantifier of logic.

Certainly, these phenomena can be considered as particular cases of the fixation of referential parameters, but it is undeniable that they extend the spectrum of the pragmatic features incorporated within the unsaid thereby requiring the saturation of a fair number of empty slots in the propositional form underlying the utterance. (I leave it to the reader - for lack of space to discuss this issue - to solve the problem we would face in analyzing the brilliant quip produced by Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, when she saves Antonio from being deprived of a pound of his flesh because *it is not said* in the contract that together with the latter Shylock is also entitled to take the blood that would also be shed: "This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood").

But let us return to the theoretical debate. The problem is complex (see also Bertuccelli Papi 1996): For once it has been recognized that the variables to be filled in are not merely those pertaining to deixis, and that their instantiation is not always linguistically controllable, it might seem that Grice's hypothesis could preserve a basic validity, though perhaps it would need revising with appropriate modifications achievable by working on the concept of context. In actual fact, however, this does not seem to be the case: Its fallaciousness lies precisely in underestimating the gap between sentence meaning and utterance meaning in other, more fundamental, respects. As a matter of fact, even if one concedes that the presence, in the propositional form, of a high number of empty boxes awaiting
saturation need not raise serious problems for logical semantics, the fact still remains that the implicit component of the said does not concern propositional content alone. The discussion that follows will put forward the hypothesis that the propositional content of the utterance is not fully identifiable unless another category is taken into account. I am referring to the notion of speaker attitude, which I believe has been underestimated in linguistic research, but which is stated very incisively in the cognitive sciences and is also extensively utilized, albeit not very rigorously, in pragmatics.

2. The concept of attitude

It is by now generally accepted in the cognitive sciences that the mind does not construct or embrace pure logical forms: Representations are processed and stored in different ways, becoming the object of predicates such as believe, know, desire, which in philosophical terms are designated as "propositional attitudes". The linguistic tradition encompasses a more extensive category of "speaker attitudes" (for a possible reconciliation of the two points of view, see Kiefer 1987).

Although there is, as far as I know, no univocal definition of the term "attitude" or a closed list of the predicates and elements that should belong to this category, it is widely believed, both in semantics and pragmatics, that utterances contain and communicate attitudes concerning the propositions they express. Certain fundamental attitudes are embodied in syntax - for instance, the indicative mode and the declarative form are thought to correspond to the line of attitudes reflecting doxastic-epistemic modality, while the imperative mode is usually regarded as expressing boulomaic-desiderative attitudes. Other attitudes are expressed by lexical elements and discourse particles, other still by prosody. In addition, in face to face communication a broad range of attitudes is certainly conveyed by gesture, mimicry and in general by extra- and paralinguistic behaviour.

In other words, in verbal interaction it is not only content identifiable in one way or another as propositions and logical forms that is transmitted. Verbal interaction also conveys - indeed, I would argue that it mainly conveys - implicit and explicit information concerning the position assumed by the speaker, both with regard to his/her own utterance and to the interlocutor. The passage of this information weaves a dense web of hypotheses, evaluations, anticipations and corrections that have long been known from neurophysiological studies on the functional systems underlying all forms of human behaviour (see Bertucelli Papi and Perfetti 1987), and hence of language as well, and which have been partly codified in the theory of speech acts. (For semantics, the most complete treatment is perhaps M. Doherty 1986).

That the notion of speaker attitude is crucial for identification of the illocutionary force of an utterance, and also contributes to definition of its perlocutionary aim, has been extensively demonstrated in speech act theory. I contend, however, that neither the degree of informativeness nor even the truth value of an utterance can be established independently of the nature and type of attitudes expressed. This should be no cause for surprise if one reflects that in verbal interaction the exchange of information unsettles the dynamic equilibrium of the entire network of knowledge possessed by an individual, impinging on that "cognitive environment" (Sperber and Wilson 1986) in which representations are
entertained according to their greater or lesser degree of probability or likelihood. If the impact of a piece of information on the listener's mind is measurable in terms of confirmation, weakening, erasure or modification of pre-existing knowledge, then it is clear that acquisition of new data during the interaction can trigger chain reactions, to the point of provoking a cognitive catastrophe in the interlocutor. My hypothesis is that the whole process of discourse understanding occurs only through the medium of perceived and communicated attitudes, and I hope the analysis of insinuation will demonstrate it.

Given this framework, it is obvious that the problem of the definition and representation of the various types of attitude cannot be disregarded by the disciplines that elect to analyze meaning within the communicative process, under pain of drifting the debate towards Neoplatonizing transcendency of dubious scientific usefulness. It cannot be denied, however, that the question is complex, and attempting to deal with all its theoretical implications in any depth would be beyond the scope of this paper. I will therefore restrict myself to outlining some of the points of the theoretical hypothesis underpinning my arguments.

1. The minimum unit of utterance meaning, i.e. of what is said - excluding, obviously, the citation meaning of 'say' - is not the minimum logical proposition $p$ that can be expressed in complete form by the utterance, but rather the indivisible formula ATT$(p)$, where "indivisible" means that the propositional content $p$, taken by itself, is a theoretical abstraction that has no independent existence from the cognitive point of view and has no operational value from the communicative point of view.

2. The category ATT will not be considered here in the reductive sense adopted in logic, which identifies its contents in terms of modal predicates that can be projected into possible worlds. On the contrary, it focuses inalienably on the speaker, thereby representing the conceptual interface between a linguistic semantics and a pragmatics capable of entering into a constructive relation with the cognitive sciences on the one hand, and with the social sciences on the other.

3. In the specific acceptation of the term adopted here, ATT is a categorial complex that encompasses within it expressions not only of the epistemic position, but also of the speaker's emotive and evaluative attitudes (the latter inspired by ethical, aesthetic, social and in general behavioural criteria) towards both his own utterance and the interlocutor. It follows that each utterance minimally contains:

   an att of the speaker towards $p$: ATT $(sp, p)$
   an att of the speaker towards the listener: ATT $(sp, list)$
   an att of the speaker towards the relation between $p$ and listener: ATT $(sp (p, list))$

The category ATT therefore does not contain attitudes that are all of one single type: On the contrary, it may be distinguished into alethic epistemic, deontic or boulamaic modality, and it may be extended to cover aesthetic, ethical or emotive evaluations that cluster around the two poles of positive and negative, which will be specified as good/bad, or beautiful/ugly, censurable/admirable etc., as the case may
be. But the greater part of research in this direction is yet to be done.

In this perspective, the concept of speaker attitude presented here is perhaps closer to Bally's modality than to logical modality or the notion of attitude utilized by Bach and Harnish (1979). Furthermore, if it is true, as claimed by Bally, that "la modalité c'est l’âme de la phrase", then it would not be out of place for a linguistic semantics to shoulder the burden of exploring its explanatory power. If studies in this area were undertaken, then it would in my view be possible to say that to the extent to which such attitudes are not always explicit, there may well be a considerable amount of pragmatics in what is said, but there is certainly an equally large amount of semantics in the unsaid. This is equivalent to saying that the division of the fields into semantics and pragmatics cannot be carried out on the basis of the dichotomy between the said and unsaid. The reason for this, as pointed out by Verschueren (1995), who advocates a return to linguistically explorable meaning in its full human complexity and not merely intentional, is that in no case is it possible for a language to say everything that the speaker wishes to say. In a linguistic semantics, said and unsaid are thus not two absolute values, but rather the extreme poles of a continuum that stretches over a range of meaning of which the proposition constitutes the lower limit, and attitudes, defined as above, the upper limit. Within this range, the semiotic gradient of the relation between explicit and implicit determines the width of oscillation of the degree of responsibility of the interpretation from speaker to listener. It is in this range that insinuation is to be found, together with other forms of "saying and not saying", such as hinting, suggesting, alluding.

3. The nature of insinuation

In a recent paper entitled "Indirections, manipulation and seduction in discourse", H. Parret proposes a definition of "insinuating" in relation to hinting and suggesting (Parret 1993).

For Parret, hinting is "to overtly display one's intention to let speaker B know that the proposition expressed contains information that will allow B to find an answer to the problem he is facing, assuming that B has access to additional information" (Parret 1993: 232). Thus when a speaker A hints, he or she gives an indication concerning the relevance of a given piece of information for the solution of a particular problem. Here no intention is concealed or camouflaged, and the information gap between A and B is only temporary, for the expectation is that B will succeed in achieving a complete picture of what A intended to say. The difference between hinting and suggesting, Parret claims, is subtle but important: Someone who makes a hint is unconditionally bound to the TRUTH of his/her utterance, whereas a person who makes a suggestion is bound only to the PROBABLE TRUTH. In the former case there is a good chance that B may recognize the final proposition, whereas in the case of a suggestion, what is suggested stands purely in a relation of probability to what is said, and it is not unreasonable to think that the inference may not lead to the expected results.

Insinuation, on the other hand, is in Parret's framework closely akin to manipulation. Like manipulation, it cannot be explicit or declared. As already pointed out by Austin in lecture VIII of How to Do Things with Words, a speaker A
cannot reveal his intentions by adding, for instance, "I hereby insinuate". On the contrary, by insinuating, the speaker’s attempt to make the interlocutor grasp something is deliberately concealed, or veiled.

The act of insinuating - according to the definition proposed - occurs when A wants B to know p but does not want B to judge that A wanted to tell him p.

I agree with Parret concerning the nature of insinuation as a form of manipulation of the interlocutor, and it is also true that not every form of manipulation can be considered as an insinuation. There are other types of manipulation which differ from insinuation in that they introduce a cluster of further sub-intentions that are not explicitly declared. However it seems to me that the proposed definition accounts for only part of the semantics and pragmatics of insinuating. As an alternative, or rather, perhaps, as an extension, I will therefore sketch a definition in line with the theoretical premises outlined above:

"Insinuation, in micro or macrotextual form, is a linguistic operation that aims to communicate a proposition by disengaging it from the operator ATT that is presumed to be associated with it in the interlocutor's mind. This aim is pursued by the insinuator through introduction of one or more propositions that act as the premises of a logical process of inferential reasoning, during which the deduction of p is left entirely up to the interlocutor. This is because the speaker A knows (and the listener knows that the speaker knows or presumes (cf. Austin 1962, lecture VI)) that the listener's ATT regarding p is emotively or evaluatively negative. Consequently, the speaker wants B to know p but does not want the evocation of the representation ATT(p) to be attributed to him/her, on account of the social consequences that would ensue (for the content of the insinuation could be offensive or face threatening)."

In other words, the crucial point about insinuation is not the nature of p but rather the attitude the speaker assumes the listener to associate with p, either out of support for some social conviction or else out of personal conviction. The entire communicative mode revolves around this circumstance, and it is no coincidence that insinuation is overwhelmingly found with propositional content having the value of doubt, suspicion, or accusation, against which the interlocutor endeavours to shape a defense with retorts of the type "What are you trying to insinuate?"

Parret seems to reject this analysis when he says that it is wrong to assume that the content of an insinuation is always reprehensible and that it is precisely the reprehensible nature of the insinuated proposition that causes the impossibility of a performative prefix. A doctor, Parret claims, can try to insinuate into a patient's mind that it would be advisable for him/her to go on a diet without this necessarily being construable as a reprehensible event. Personally, I believe that this objection can be overcome once it is realized that in this case, what is being insinuated is not the advice itself, but on the contrary the indirect charge of being too fat, which is generally accompanied by a negative ATT.

Moreover, the success of insinuation is linked to the recovery of knowledge which, taken in conjunction with the speaker's literal proposition, enables the listener to deduce the proposition that the speaker intended to communicate indirectly. It is this knowledge that leads to p being identified as a negative ATT, but it also stands in opposition to a complementary set which does not necessarily lead to a p with negative ATT. Thus the insinuation fails if the interlocutor activates the complementary set within his own cognitive environment. For instance an
utterance such as:

(4) Your wife has been out with Bob quite often recently

functions as an insinuation that the wife in question has betrayed the husband-listener with a certain Bob only if the husband activates knowledge of a certain type within his mind. But if, instead, the husband active knowledge relating to the fact that this Bob is a friend who frequently suffers from crises of depression, then the contextual effect of the utterance will be different. In this case, the listener is likely to interpret the utterance as a simple allusion (see Bertuccelli Papi in print), for instance with the meaning that "Therefore Bob is going through a bad patch again". This will act retroactively on the speaker who intended to insinuate adultery, obliging him/her to introduce additional material that points more compellingly in that direction.

An even finer analysis of insinuation will also have to keep in mind that 1) the listener's ATT towards the speaker is an important factor in detection of insinuation. As Austin conjectured in lecture VI of How to Do Things with Words, there are some things that can act as insinuations if said by some particular person but not if said by another person; 2) the speaker's attitude towards the attitude held by the listener towards p is also a parameter that can help to distinguish between different types of insinuation. In this connection, it is well to note that there are varying degrees of nastiness embodied in insinuations. Unpleasant insinuations are those which involve the speaker's malicious pleasure over the negative effect p will have on the interlocutor, whereas insinuations aiming simply to relieve the speaker of the responsibility for this negative effect are less nasty.

An example of this second kind can be found in the first act of Waiting for Godot. The insinuation by Estragon, which extends over several repartees, aims to cast doubt on Vladimir's certainty that the place where they are waiting is the right place (face threatening insinuation):

E. Let's go
V. We cant
E. Why not?
V. We are waiting for Godot
E. Ah... You're sure it was here?
V. What?
E. That we were to wait
V. He said by the tree... Do you see any othrs?
E. What is it?
V. I don't know - a willow
E. Where are the leaves?
V. It must be dead
E. No more weeping
V. Or perhaps it's not the season
E. Looks to me more like a bush
V. A shrub
E. A bush
V. A - What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?
4. Jago's insinuation

An example of a rather nastier type of insinuation is to be found in the great dialogue between Iago and Othello, in Act III of Shakespeare's tragedy. Iago has just caught sight of Cassius talking to Desdemona, and he seizes the opportunity to set in motion his grandiose plan: "... while this honest fool / plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes, / And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor", Iago tells the public, "I'll pour this pestilence into his ear! That she repeals him for her body's lust; / ...So will I turn her virtue into pitch. / And out of her own goodness make the net / That shall enmesh them all.

Iago's rhetoric and his discourse tactics have been analyzed in depth with great sensitivity and keen literary awareness by esteemed literary scholars and linguists (among the latter, see Coulthard 1977; Widdowson 1982). My analysis of the above cited dialogue will not endeavour to offer aesthetic judgments but will focus instead on obtaining information concerning possible modes of introduction and accomplishment of insinuation within the theoretical perspective sketched above.

This does not, however, mean that the Shakespearian text can be treated as if it were simply a fragment of real conversation. Even if one admits that drama cannot truly be considered literature, there can be no dispute concerning the semiotic conditions imposed by the setting up and treatment of an expressive category within the terms of dramatic fiction. Nor can one ignore the ideological-cultural presuppositions that form the background and framework of the use of rhetoric in the Elizabethan drama, and in Shakespearian drama in particular. For if it is borne in mind that from the point of view of rhetorical analysis, insinuation makes use of the metalogistic instruments of suppression, such as litotes, suspension, reticence to the point of silence, then it cannot be ignored that the rhetoric of silence and of the forms of indirect modes of speech played a highly significant role in the 16th. and 17th. century. Between 1500 and 1600 the imperatives of silence assumed the value of signs denoting the quality of a gentleman, and were the response to a model of social and political behaviour governed by prudence. In the 17th. century this model was embodied by the Courtesan, in whose hands it became a tactical instrument for astute calculations designed to take possession of others, dominate them and exert domination over them. The silence of dissimulation, the smug silence of adulation, scornful silence, and the many other forms of deceitful behaviour later theorized by Abbé Dinouart were already present as essential mechanisms of the Art of the Courtesan, an art founded on discretion, circumspection, medietas. Truth was never completely revealed, but neither was it ever completely concealed.

Within this framework, Iago's verbal technique and ability are a perfect mirror of his era: Iago is fully in control of himself, unlike Othello, who more than once admits his naiveté where rhetorical conduct is concerned: "Rude am I in my speech. / And little bless'd with the soft phrase of peace"; "Haply, for I am black, / And have not those soft parts of conversation / that chamberers have.....". Iago thus pursues his own ends in a methodical and pre-ordained manner, systematically isolating all the attitudes characterizing Othello's initial condition and destroying them one by one.
This initial condition is represented by the following coordinates.

Three textual themes are evoked:

1. Othello's relationship with Desdemona
2. Othello's relationship with Cassius
3. Othello's relationship with Iago

Each of these is associated with a complex of epistemic attitudes which themselves call forth positive emotional values:

1. Othello believes, indeed is fervently convinced that 1) Desdemona loves him and is faithful to him; 2) Cassius is honest; 3) Iago is sincere and disinterested.

These relations are in turn the object of epistemic and evaluative attitudes on the part of Iago himself. Iago knows that 1) Desdemona loves the Moor; 2) Cassius loves Desdemona; 3) Othello has a high regard for Cassius and trusts Desdemona. In addition, the audience knows - either because they have seen it with their own eyes or else because Iago has stated as much - that what Othello knows is only partly true. In particular, the audience knows that Iago is far from being sincere and disinterested.

Now, presumably to avenge the wrong inflicted on him by Othello, who had rejected him as his lieutenant in favour of Cassius, or perhaps because Othello had slipped into his conjugal bed - but Bradley rightly has doubts about the real motivation for Iago's wickedness - Iago wants to transform Othello's initial condition into its opposite as far as relations with Cassius and Desdemona are concerned. Otherwise stated, Othello must be made to believe that Desdemona does not love him and is betraying him with Cassius. But to achieve this result, it is necessary that he should continue to believe that Iago is sincere and disinterested. Iago pursues this latter aim by activating a "ritual of honour", as Emmanuele Tesauro was to describe it a few years later in his Cannochiale Aristotelico, a ritual bearing all the external hallmarks of high regard and encompassing a wide range of constitutive acts, whose semiotic features make up the pattern of "the etiquette of situation control".

The primary objective, on the other hand, is pursued through the medium of insinuation, which procedes to dismantle Othello's attitudes of certainty by operating on two main semantic oppositions: Seeming/being and true/false, Iago must make what is true seem to be mere appearance, and appearances must be made to look as if they were the truth. To this end, Iago subtly plays on the relation between explicit and implicit: He explicitly casts doubt on the truth, reducing it to mere appearance, and implicitly asserts a falsehood, clothing it in substance.

The insinuation proceeds from what Othello knows about Cassius, and sets itself the goal of undermining the logical equation between what is known (Kp) and what is true (p), replacing it - as the first step in a semantic weakening - by the relativizing equation between what is known and what seems to be true. But Iago's cunningness, and indeed the characteristic property of insinuation, consists, as we have seen, in inducing Othello himself to perform the operation. This is achieved, in the first part of the dialogue, through two main instruments: A fictitious question and several echo statements.

Thus the question from which the operation starts out, "My noble lord....Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady, / Know of your love?", is a false question,
very close to a rhetorical question, and has the function of introducing the first textual theme, namely the relation between Othello and Cassius and the set of attitudes associated with them. If the intuition is correct, then this means that one of the conditions for a successful question is not satisfied. In this particular case, it is the sincerity condition, which assumes that the answer is not yet known to the speaker. Notice that in the linguistic theory of speech acts, the sincerity condition is the locus of speaker attitudes, and Othello perceives that something is about to happen on this plane. It is for this reason that he replies by enquiring about the real motivation for the question. Intentionally, Iago responds to Othello’s query with reticent behaviour: The transformation has now been set in motion and Othello will no longer be able to elude the seduction of the unsaid.

The echo answers ("Honest, my lord? Think, my lord!") can but reinforce Othello’s creeping suspicion that what he knows is threatened by something else Iago is giving him to understand that he, Iago, is aware of. For the echo utterance indicates that the speaker is focusing attention not so much on the content of the (interlocutor’s) utterance as on its representation in the interlocutor’s mind, i.e. on p and its categorial complex of associated attitudes. It thus acts as a signal suggesting that one of the reasons why the speaker is focusing on that utterance is the very fact that it has been produced and expressed by the interlocutor, and this in its turn suggests an att towards the representation itself. The quantity and types of attitudes that a speaker can evoke through an echo utterance is potentially limitless - from approval to reverence, from surprise to incredulity to irony, and reveals an equally vast range of discordant evaluations of the content of the representation itself - inappropriacy, falseness, absurdity (Sperber and Wilson 1993) ... All these are inevitably projected onto the interlocutor, shattering his/her value system. Iago’s echoic quips sting Othello to the heart because they put their finger right on his convictions, i.e. they strike directly at the fact that he, the great general, believes in what he believes, and at the presuppositions on which these beliefs rest.

This first step is fundamental for the subsequent unfolding of the dialogue. After evoking Othello’s att towards Cassius, Iago progressively broadens the semantic scope of the insinuation, bringing into sharp focus the entire existential world of Othello, his credibility, his claim to authority, his intelligence. Othello is now left alone to face himself, or rather his own attitudes (what he thinks, believes, knows), but with the awareness that there exists another possible world, the complementary set of attitudes of opposite polarity which Iago is slowly instilling into his mind (note the assertion "I did not think he had been acquainted with her" and the restriction "for aught I know").

As a defensive move, Othello then appeals to the second thematic relation: The relationship with Iago. "If thou dost love me, / Show me thy thought", and indeed Iago proclaims his affection for Othello, but as the object of a super-ordered epistemic attitude which has the effect of maintaining the empathetic orientation of the discourse that is prospectively directed towards Othello: "My lord, you KNOW I love you". Othello must also shoulder the responsibility for his own judgement of Iago - which is exactly what Iago wanted in order to be able to continue in the course of action he has set himself. The equation between knowing and being is presented to Othello arrayed in all its enigmatic dimension. The next step is fully in line with this progression: A semantic shift from being to seeming takes place, whereby Iago vigorously asserts that Cassius is honest "For Michael Cassio, / I dare
be sworn I think that he is honest." But this is a courtesan's tribute which confirms to Othello that knowing and being coincide as regards Iago. The road is now open for the latter to launch a new and definitive attack on Othello's atts towards Cassius: "Men should be what they seem; / Or those that be not, would they might seem none!". "Certain, men should be what they seem." replies Othello, expressing an agreement that reverently mirrors Iago's thought. From the latter there now comes a reiterated declaration of confidence in Cassius' honesty, though fractionally weakened semantically as a result of the predicate of propositional attitude: Thus where one might expect an oath to swear his belief, one merely finds "Why then, I think Cassio's an honest man".

Othello, now engulfed in the coils of the poisonous insinuation, cannot fail to perceive the treacherous thrust of Iago's allusive jibe. Faced with a renewed demand for explanation, Iago resorts to a crafty strategy of exploiting the presupposition to make an implicit admission that he does have secret thoughts. By dint of this ruse, he shrinks even further away from his communicative responsibility. He then takes shelter behind a parenthetical litosis which aims to reinforce Othello's att towards himself, by stating that he, Iago, does not wish to confess these thoughts because they could be the fruit of deceit. With two rhetorical questions, he then outlines to Othello what the negative effects deriving from the revelation might be. The culminating point of this sequence has now been reached, and we are now at the climax: Significantly, we are at the heart of the dialogue, and, iconically, we feel that we are in Othello's heart. Slowly, cautiously, through gnomic sentences and generic comments, the third theme is brought in, the most delicate and dangerous one for Iago: The theme of the relation between Othello and Desdemona. Iago lays siege to this last stronghold of Othello's heart with an admonishment "O! beware, my lord, of jealousy; I It is the green-ey'd monster which doth mock / The meat it feeds on;", and brings up such subjects as doubts, suspicions...Defeated, Othello bursts out into a howl of anxiety, but then he immediately takes control of himself again and, with a burst of pride, sets about defending himself with all the force of his rationality: "Why, why is this? / Think'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy, / To follow still the changes of the moon / With fresh suspicions? ....... No, Iago; / I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove; / And, on the proof, there is no more but this, / Away at once with love or jealousy!!.

But Iago seizes hold of none other than his OTHELLO'S rationality to bring his plan to completion and destroy that certainty as well. He launches forth again with a negation that is paraleipsis. "I speak not yet of proof", only to contradict this statement by proceeding to give a demonstration that piles up its evidence in the wake of an ominous warning: "Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio". This artifice explicitly focuses on the underlying theme of insinuation, and implicitly introduces the actual proposition that Iago intends to insinuate. And indeed it is none other than Desdemona who becomes the central point concerning and against whom Iago sharpens his weapons, until he shapes for Othello's mind the loathsome syllogism: "She that .... could give out such a seeming / To seel her father's eyes up close as oak..." Suspension. Othello is distraught, yet he will not give up, and he verbally repeats his own conviction that Desdemona is honest. Iago's exclamation has a sardonic ring to it: "Long live she so! and long live you to think so!" But Othello unforgivably falters at one crucial point, "And, yet, how nature erring from itself - "and Iago cannot forego the final stab: "Much will be seen in that"...."
Through the very force of the logical argument itself, the possible becomes necessary, and appearance becomes reality.

5. Conclusion

Insinuation plays havoc with Othello’s values, destroying, one after another, the alethic, epistemic, deontic and emotive values of the operator which, in my hypothesis, initially characterizes Othello’s thought. However, since the propositional contents thus laid bare cannot remain shorn of values, the latter will be substituted by different ones - those intended by Iago, who has seduced Othello’s intellect and drawn him onto his side. Othello thus now stands before him as a desubjectivized subject, for whom nothing is left but to acknowledge his bewilderment: "I think my wife be honest and think she is not; / I think that thou art just and think thou art not. / I'll have some proof..."

References


